

A Healthier Scotland

RESPONSE FROM RCGP SCOTLAND

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the academic organisation in the UK for general practitioners. Its aim is to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the 'voice' of general practitioners on education, training and issues around standards of care for patients.

The College in Scotland came into existence in 1953 (one year after the UK College), when a Scottish Council was created to take forward the College's interests within the Scottish Health Service. We currently represent over 4700 GP members and Associates in Training throughout Scotland. In addition to a base in Edinburgh, the College in Scotland is represented through five regional faculty offices in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee and Glasgow.

Comments

General points

We agree that there is a problem in Scotland with obesity, and with general knowledge about nutrition and exercise. However, we do not believe that Scotland is unique in having these issues to deal with. Our response is based on the current situation where Scotland is part of the UK. We do not consider that a new body would be required unless Scotland became independent from the UK at some point in the future, and this led to a lack of access to the UK based resources that we currently use.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has a comprehensive range of responsibilities, and it is unfortunately that the horse meat issue was not picked up earlier by the FSA. However, we do not believe that an additional four country based bodies would necessarily be more successful, and suggest that they would in fact reduce joint working and may lead to different standards throughout the UK in this important area.

We would suggest instead that the functions of the FSA should be strengthened where required to ensure it is able to fully fulfil its function across the UK and ensure a consistent high standard in all areas. Having a Scottish food regulatory organisation would not necessarily have prevented horse meat being combined with other meats more successfully than having a UK based body such as the FSA. It may be that the preferred option should be to return the FSA to a fully independent body with its original responsibilities.

The Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition is an independent organisation which

provides advice to the FSA and the National Health Service (NHS). Some of the proposed work of the new body is currently provided by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN).

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The current remit of FSA in Scotland seems to be acceptable. We believe that the FSA should continue providing a service to the whole of the UK, but their regulatory functions should be strengthened.

We believe that the Scottish Government already has the power to introduce legislation to improve nutrition. We think that creating a new body delegates that function to an organisation which will not necessarily have the authority to effect change. We believe public health measures should remain with current organisations responsible for this.

Dr John Duncan
Deputy Chair (Policy)
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